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DISTRICT  
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# Blowsand Reader

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## Start Your Engines!

By Garratt Aitchison, District Superintendent

Ladies and gentlemen. Boys and girls. Start your engines! Welcome back to another season of riding, exploring, and family fun. Staff have been busy preparing your park for your arrival, from preparing trails and mending fences to sprucing up the facilities. We have a great crew this year with many new faces...all eager to ensure that your visit is rewarding and memorable.

There has been movement on several issues, both at the local and Department-wide level, that will have a positive impact on the Ocotillo Wells District. The first, and perhaps the most significant, is the restructuring or reorganization efforts that the Department is considering. Although no final decisions have been made yet, we do know that there will be changes. The primary focus is looking at how we as a Department can become more efficient in our delivery of service to the public, our management of the resources, and several of our internal processes.

Some have expressed concern over the future integrity of the OHV program as the Department looks at a reorganization. We are fortunate to have executive leadership that understands the complexity of the OHV program and is committed to its continued success. Over the last several months, Director Lisa Mangat has reached out to the OHV community through town-hall-type forums. She has shared her vision, intentions, and more importantly reiterated that the OHV program is here to stay. To summarize her message, any restructuring of the Department will not minimize the OHV program or your opportunities to ride and explore.

Many of you look forward to the park-sponsored or private events that take place in the park each year. Unable to permit any events last year due to the endangered species candidacy period for the flat-tailed horned lizard, we are anticipating a final decision by the California Fish and Game Commission following their December meeting in San Diego. Although the final decision will determine how we proceed with special event permitting and other park operations, we are excited that a decision is just around the corner. Regardless of the decision, we

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## Start Your Engines! *continued...*

will continue our conservation efforts as part of a multi-agency group of scientists and public land managers.

Our General Plan update continues to make progress. A complete draft Plan, which incorporates much of the public's comments and concerns, is being prepared this month. An environmental study and public comment period will follow prior to the adoption and implementation of the Plan. Although the Plan doesn't call for significant changes to the park as we know it, it does allow for opportunities to improve upon recreational activities, camping, concessions, and specific goals and guidelines for ongoing resource protection.



Again, welcome back and enjoy your park. Make new friendships, stop and chat with park staff, and take with you memories that will last a lifetime.

## Meet Ittai ...

My name is Ittai Levine. I enjoy playing guitar, ultimate Frisbee and rock climbing, and I have always loved the outdoors. At the age of 16 I started working for the Massachusetts Audubon society teaching children about nature. For college, I moved up to the mountains of Vermont and got a degree in conservation ecology from Sterling College. From there, I worked for Nature's Classroom in Massachusetts as a teacher and then moved to Southern California, where I worked as a naturalist for Pathfinder Ranch. Most recently, I finished my second season working for Glacier National Park as a Park Ranger in Interpretation, and I am very excited to be back in the warm and beautiful desert in Ocotillo Wells working for Interpretation!



## Meet our New Staff Services Analyst!

Hi, I'm Kitty Gravett and I work in the Administrative Department. As of October 1<sup>st</sup>, I've been promoted to Staff Services Analyst—still doing Personnel, but taking on some of the accounting duties permanently.

I am a native Southern Californian, born in Inglewood. I graduated from Loara High School in Anaheim, and spent my younger years being a mom and raising my three children—Jeff, Jeremy and Kristina. Prior to moving to El Centro in 2004, I worked for School Ten, Inc., a state-licensed drunk driving program, for 12 years as the Administrative Case Manager (a fancy title for the Assistant Director). My partner Charlie and I decided we needed a change of scenery and moved to the desert where I worked at the Toyota dealership in El Centro for 1½ years. In August 2006, I was offered a position at Ocotillo Wells as an Office Assistant, where I started doing accounting. About three months later, I was promoted to Office Technician, and six months later, I was upgraded to the Management Services Technician, where I've found my home for the past nine years. I have grown to love the desert, but still try to return to the coast as much as possible to spend time with my family, including my six grandchildren.



## Meet Jack ...

My name is Jack Brown and I am an Environmental Scientist Intern in Ocotillo Wells SVRA. I studied geological science at SDSU and specialized in structural geology. I spent three seasons field mapping areas off of Poleline Road and completed my award-winning undergraduate thesis there as well. I came to OW to continue working in this beautiful desert and broaden my knowledge of biology and resource management. During my time here, I hope to answer some geology-related questions within the park, as well as creating an informative presentation on the geologic history of the basin evolution for training of park employees.





# “A Rose By Any Other Name...”

By Steve Thompson, Senior Park Aide, Interpretation

## ...Smells Just as Sweet”

Have you taken a trip through our RC Track?

Over the past year, our dedicated Trails staff tirelessly erected 13 obstacles, giving birth to OW's very own Remote Control Track. Join the fun at the track this year to witness the laughter and team accomplishments of our visitors. You may even see a few friendships put to the test!



Hearing jokes and jabs as visitors traverse the course is wonderful, but the most entertaining part is the names people create for the obstacles! There are a variety of obstacles, each with its own personality...so you can imagine the diverse names our visitors use to describe them!

Everyone walks away with new names for our obstacles, grins on their faces, a lightness to their steps, and hopefully an enhanced understanding of positive and negative impacts to their park.



If you could name one of the obstacles, which one would it be and what would you name it? E-mail RC track obstacle name suggestions to Steve Thompson at [steve.thompson@parks.ca.gov](mailto:steve.thompson@parks.ca.gov)

P.S. Stay tuned for a RC Tread Lightly video starring the Trails crew later this season!

# Second Annual Spooktacular Celebration

By Sharon Weil, State Park Interpreter I

The Second Annual Ocotillo Wells Spooktacular celebration was a howling success, enjoyed by over 750 visitors. The evening got under way with trick or treating around Howling Meg circle. Ghosts, goblins, Superman, and even the Mad Hatter were seen going table to table, collecting delicious and delectable sweet treats. As the spooky night continued, many visitors tested their nerves with a trip through Dead Edgar's graveyard where the search was under way for his body parts. The haunted walkway celebrated the night of terror with zombies, ghillie man and giant spiders popping from out of nowhere.



Two exciting interpretive programs also highlighted the evening's festivities. The ever-popular scorpion safari proved to be a big hit with those in attendance who enjoyed hearing interesting facts about this special desert creature. Attendees were also able to meet this animal up close and personal by

actually searching for them using a black light. The bat program gave visitors the chance to observe bats flying through the air hunting. Using state-of-the-art detection equipment, visitors could actually hear the bats searching for their yummy bug dinner using echolocation.



Children of all ages gathered in the Discovery Center to make special spider necklaces in celebration of the creepy occasion. Afterwards they had a great time standing outside near the warm fire making delicious s'more treats. The evening ended with a prize drawing for those who came in costume.



It was truly a night of spooky fun, delicious treats and interesting information about some of our special desert animals. A special thanks to all the volunteers, Friends of Ocotillo Wells, and visitor/CPA Alisa M. Carini for making this kick off event to the riding season truly a spooktacular time!

# Geologic History of OW Through Time

By Jack Brown, Environmental Scientist Intern

Interpretation staff training on October 21<sup>st</sup> started with a geologic discussion of the formation of the Salton Trough from very early in earth history. After the cooling of the crust and the formation of Pangaea, North America began to move westward, subducting the Farallon Plate on its westward edge. This process formed many iterations of volcanic arcs, which are responsible for the mountain ranges that border the desert region. North America moved westward nearly uninhibited for roughly 200 million years until the spreading boundary between the Pacific Plate and Farallon Plate reached the coastline. Roughly 30 million years ago, that spreading center was subducted beneath the continental crust, forming the San Andreas Fault system. Baja California was rifted away from mainland Mexico around 5 million years ago due to the extreme forces of the spreading center beneath the continent. The Sea of Cortez rushed into this space created by the tectonics all the way to present-day Indio.

Shortly, thereafter, the Colorado River started to intrude into the sea and started depositing the sediment it carried as a delta on the east end of the basin. As time went on, this delta prograded westward, eventually closing off the northern portion of the basin as the river redirected its course to the south. Through time the river changed its course many times, eventually refilling the northern basin with what is now known as Lake Cahuilla. The river eventually stopped feeding the lake and redirected its path to the south, creating the delta at the north end of the Sea of Cortez.



Figure 1: Shell impression fossil from the Latrania Fm.

The spreading center beneath the desert continued to pull the western edge away from the eastern edge, continually lowering the basin. This thinned the crust and allowed magma to reach closer to the surface, giving the region its geothermal capabilities and features.

The first stop on the staff tour was an exposure along Quarry Road where the Peninsular Ranges Batholith (remnants of the volcanic arc) is exposed. Moving closer to the present day, the next stop was on the northern side of Devil's Slide to see an exposure of the Latrania Formation which was the first sedimentary unit deposited in the basin. The Latrania Formation is a marine turbidite sequence (underwater landslide) that took place under the ancient ocean that resided in the basin. The next stop was at Shell Reef, which exposes roughly 4-5 million year old shallow sea environment of lithified (turned into rock) bivalve and other marine shell animals. The group then examined a petrified log near East Bank Wash and Pumpkin Patch Trail which represents the time

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## Geologic History of OW Through Time *continued...*

when the basin was full of grasses and hardwoods, supporting some of the mammoth, equine, and feline animals that lived at the time. Pumpkin Patch was the next stop along the tour, in order to look at one of the concretion types within the park. Pumpkin Patch concretions are cemented by calcium carbonite in round balls of varying size that preserve the initial bedding planes into which the cementation intruded. Continuing along Tule Wash to the east, the group noted a cross-section of an oblique normal fault that is exposed in the northern wash wall.



Figure 2: Petrified log that has been eroded into pieces

After a lunch break, the group continued into Tectonic Gorge and Tierra Del Sol trails where another type of concretion (Cannonball Wash) can be observed *in situ* still eroding out of the now exposed sediment. Along this section of the tour, the wash walls have vast exposures of the sediments in the Diablo Formation. The Gas Domes attraction was the next stop along the tour, where staff and visitors discussed faulting and geothermal activity that allowed the water and gas below to seep to the surface. Artesian Well was the next stop, highlighting the failed



Figure 3: Broken concretion showing starting growth areas

oil industry of the region and the lack of an oil trap (a place that stops the oil and gas from escaping to the surface) that ended the search for oil in OW. The tour continued down Oil Well Wash to an exposure of mud concretions that aggregated together from the tumbling motion along a tributary or wash bed. Further south along Oil Well Wash, an exposure of lake sediments can be seen with an unconformity (geologic break in time due to erosion) lying about one meter below. This occurred as the wave action from the lake cut away at the old deposits as the lake sediments were deposited above. The tour concluded at the junction of Oil Well Wash with Highway 78.

# OW Maintenance News



By Alfredo Jacobo, Park Maintenance Supervisor



Park Maintenance Worker I Chris Dahl built a gun cleaning table for the Rangers, using shotgun shells for the door handles.



The Maintenance crew worked hard repairing and installing the travel trailers used by the Lifeguards. Vern Gingrich, SMA, is shown at the right. Other workers involved in this project were Leon Jordan, PMW I, Jeff Smith, PMW I and Garry Andrews, SMA.



Jeff Smith led the Housekeeping crew on the weekends for the month of October. Jeff's experience and leadership kept the operation running smoothly and safely!!!

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## OW Maintenance News *continued...*



The Housekeeping crew led by Larry Grosse, our PMA, did a fantastic job over the Halloween weekend. Members of the Housekeeping crew include Allison Boyle (above, right), Ana Anguiano, Tanya Tynan (above, left), Adriana Troncoso, Alexis Hernandez and Cesar Rodriguez.

## Meet Cesar ...

My name is Cesar Saul Rodriguez. I was born in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico. I love my family and spending time with them and my grandkids. I love playing with them. Soccer, football and boxing are my favorite sports. I have worked more than 25 years on construction jobs. I'm also a dental assistant. I love any type of nature, and love animals. I really enjoy a good conversation about family and nature. Last but not least, I enjoy working out in this beautiful desert. The Housekeeping Department welcomes Cesar to their staff.



# Heber Dunes Happenings

By Jaime Mendez, State Park Interpreter I

## Pictures Worth a Thousand Words



Symbolic butterflies cluster at Heber Dunes for a brief rest before continuing their journey to Mexico.

The 2016-17 Afterschool Junior Rangers started off this season creating group butterflies as part of the Symbolic Monarch Migration project. Junior Rangers have been tracking the flight of this interesting species online to kick off their Migration Madness activity series. The kids are looking forward to learning about scientific animal tracking technology and making their own 3-D migration maps.

If all works out as planned, the Junior Rangers will also be comparing their findings on migrating Baja California species with students in National City (USA) and San Felipe, Mexico, in conjunction with the Ocean Connectors program.

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## Heber Dunes Happenings *continued...*

### Heber Maintenance survives another long hot summer!

Summer is never a slow season for the Maintenance crew at Heber Dunes. Tree trimming and pruning, of course, is a constant chore, so the installation of new concrete trash receptacles and a gravel pathway were a welcome change of pace. OW equipment operator Dan even pitched in with the backhoe to assist Maintenance aides, Luis and Cesar, with the trenching for a new telephone line. Dan also helped relocate the Park's dumpsters. Thanks to the work and dedication of Heber's Maintenance team, Heber Dunes SVRA will be in tip-top shape for a new off-road season.

A shout out to Maribel Bonillas for this edition's Maintenance update!

### And the best news of all -

Heber Dunes SVRA "official" maps have finally arrived—all 10,000 of them! Get your copy today at the Heber Dunes SVRA Ranger office before they run out.

## Meet Jan ...

My name is Jan Naragon. A confessed mountain-holic, I blame my obsession on childhood family car trips from Ohio to the western US. I lived in the Washington Cascades before being lured to Borrego Springs by a family friend. I had obtained degrees in Spanish and cultural/natural Resource Management in Washington, with special interest in waterborne illness, and had collected and analyzed environmental health data for the State of Washington. After moving to Borrego, I taught English as a Second Language and worked as a substitute teacher. My husband and I enjoy working on home improvement projects, hiking, and learning about desert plants. I am delighted to be using my training to spread the good news about the fascinating Colorado Desert to families and children. The Interpretation Department welcomes Jan!





## Meet Alexis ...

My name is Alexis Hernandez, and I have lived in the area for over ten years. I attend Imperial Valley College and will transfer to Cal State Monterey Bay where I will obtain my degree in Spanish. Working as a Maintenance Aide in Housekeeping on the weekends is nice, since I get to see the wildlife around here. Also, working with cool people in this department makes the job more interesting. I look forward to having a good time in this new experience.



## Meet Robert ...

My name is Robert Delmanowski, and I am originally from Fresno, CA, where I attended Fresno State to earn my B.S. in ecology along with my M.S. in biology. While attending graduate school, I was also employed with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, where I worked on the San Joaquin River Restoration Program to help restore self-sustaining populations of Chinook salmon. I recently began working for Ocotillo Wells SVRA as an Environmental Services Intern in the Resources Department. With this position I perform various wildlife surveys to monitor the plants and animals within our park. Ocotillo Wells SVRA lies within the Colorado Desert, which is a very new experience for me. My basic understanding of the desert before moving out here was that the desert is a harsh environment, so there would be very few plants and animals that are able to live in the area. However, I could not have been more wrong! It has blown my mind learning about the diversity of plants and animals that are able to scratch out a living here in the desert. I have already learned an incredible amount since beginning this position, and I continue to learn more and more every day.



# Spending a Weekend Away From the Heat

James Claar, Supervising State Park Peace Officer

The first weekend in September, I was able to participate in a special detail of patrolling on the eastern side of the famed Rubicon Trail. Most of the day was spent navigating the rocky terrain in a two-seat ROV Polaris RZR.



An OHMVR Division staff ranger and I were able to make several well-being contacts throughout the weekend and some verbal warnings for infraction violations. All visitors that we came in contact with praised our presence on the trail. If you ever get the chance to spend a weekend up on the “Con,” I would highly recommend it; the spectacular views are worth it.



# Small Mammal Trapping

By Robert Delmanowski, Environmental Services Intern

The Natural Resources Department at Ocotillo Wells SVRA recently began its fall session of small mammal trapping, and so far the results have not disappointed! The mammal trapping surveys are done as part of the Habitat Monitoring System (HMS) at Ocotillo Wells, which also includes reptile, bird, and vegetation monitoring. There are a total of ten different plots throughout the park where these surveys take place. The first round of small mammal trapping included the plot we call Homestead, which is located a few hundred yards to the north of the District office. To the surprise of us all, there were significantly more small mammals trapped at Homestead compared to the previous year!

These mammal surveys are conducted over a three-day time period, with the traps checked every morning and reset every afternoon. Many of the small mammals in our park are granivores, meaning they eat seeds as their primary food source. To attract these animals, we bait the traps with birdseed. Once captured, each animal has its sex determined and its length and weight measured, and it is labeled with a unique marking to identify it if captured again the following nights. These recaptured individuals help us calculate the detection probability, or the likelihood of capturing each small mammal at least once on the plot we are surveying. This detection probability is then used to extrapolate how many individuals may actually be on the plot.



Canyon Mouse

With the drought negatively affecting life out in the park over the past few years, it is nice to see a positive change. In fall 2015, there were six individuals captured at Homestead, with nine total captures (three were recaptured). The species trapped included Merriam's kangaroo rats and antelope ground squirrels. In fall 2016, there were 18 different individuals captured at Homestead, with 34 total captures. There was also more diversity this year, which included Merriam's kangaroo rats, antelope ground squirrels, little pocket mice, and canyon mice. It was incredible to see such a sharp increase over the course of a year!

There is some uncertainty as to why there was such a significant increase in small mammals this year, but one theory credits the 1.09 inches of rain OW received in January 2016. This timely rainfall provided plenty of moisture for the beautiful



Antelope Ground Squirrel

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## Small Mammal Trapping *continued...*

spring wildflowers that can be found throughout the park. With more water, there are more wildflowers, which provide enough food to sustain more small mammals. Because many small mammals are granivores, the seeds that are produced from these wildflowers are a large portion of their diet.

However, the food chain does not stop there. With an increase in these animals, we may also see an increase in the primary predator of these animals...snakes! Many snakes that live in Ocotillo Wells prey primarily on small mammals, so an increase in their food source may equate to an increase in their numbers. The next time we survey for reptiles on Homestead will be in the spring of 2017, where we hope to find thriving populations of snakes!



Craig Fischer holding a mouse

## Meet Alex ...

My name is Alex Napier and I am a new hire with the Resources Department. I recently graduated from California State University, Stanislaus, with my bachelors in Anthropology with an emphasis in Archaeology. I previously worked with non-profits and educational institutions until I decided to go back to school. This is my first job with State Parks. I was born and raised in Riverside, and spent many summers in the Sonoran desert around Phoenix. Ocotillo Wells is a new experience for me, but it already feels like home. Thank you for being so welcoming!

This photo shows me on top of the Huaca de la Luna in Peru, where I recently completed an internship.



# Visitor Services

By Pete Estes, State Park Peace Officer

As summer ends and temperatures begin to drop, the action starts heating up for the Ocotillo Wells Visitor Services team. The kick-off to the season took place on October 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, and 16<sup>th</sup> with the Desert Lifeguard training. With new faces coming in every year, this training provides the guidelines for how we work at OW and gives each member of the team time to practice and hone vital medical skills in a lower-stress training environment.

This year the DLs will be led by two of our returnees, Matthew Dawson and Austin Toogood. Both Matt and Austin will provide guidance and will typically serve as our medical leads on major incidents. Along with Dawson and Toogood, we have 3 other returning DLs, Cole Magro, Wes Hatfield, and Cameron Faris are all returning for their second season at OW. That leaves us with ten new DL faces for our winter crew. The ten new faces are coming from coastal beaches to spend their winter protecting the park from the people and the people from the park. On a Friday, Saturday, or Sunday, you can catch our DLs patrolling the park; feel free to wave them over and meet them all.

Along with the returning DLs, our ranger staff has stayed pretty much the same from last season. We still have Adam Borello and Russ Fortin as our Field Supervisors and Brittany Veater, Luke Ware, and Angelica Rios as field staff. The only loss in Ranger staff was Jason Fincher due to a transfer to BLM. He will be missed by the staff and the visitors as he always did an exceptional job at

OW. To help fill openings in the Ranger ranks, we received one of the two cadets we were expecting from the recently completed State Parks Academy. Peter Estes is our newest Ranger at OW and after completing his Field Training Assignment at Lake Perris, he is excited for his first season at OW.

The training weekend is really the start to the busy winter riding season here at OW. The training offers a variety of scenarios and involves multiple agencies. For first timers (me!) it is a real

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## Visitor Services *continued...*

eye-opener to how many resources we have at our disposal to help injured riders. From our amazing DLs who are all Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs), State Parks Rangers who are Emergency Medical Responders (EMRs) or EMTs, allied fire and medics from surrounding stations, and the amazing capabilities of the Reach and Mercy Air Airships to take critical patients to advanced medical care as quickly as possible, riders at OW have the highest level of public safety personnel caring for them.



Ranger to “respond” to a call for service. Every team arrived on-scene and worked through the realistic rider down scenario they were presented with. Sunday culminated with the large scale, multi-agency scenario that has become a hallmark of this training. This multi-agency scenario not only allows our new DLs and Rangers to see what a big medical calls looks like, but it also knocks the rust

The DL training starts out with an

intro to the park and the long history of the DL program. The first day was lots of classroom time, as there is much to know about this park. From monitoring two radios to driving in deep sand, things can get tricky out there. Day two started with an early morning wake-up call for the DLs; this was to simulate receiving a call for service in the middle of the night, as we routinely do. The DLs had to get dressed and “on-scene” at the Discovery Center where scenarios were staged for them to work through. The rest of Saturday was spent practicing trauma-specific medical skills such as splinting legs and arms, applying traction splints, and safely placing patients on backboards for transport. At the end of the day, the DLs were paired up with a



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## Visitor Services *continued...*

off the returning crew and allows management to watch over the entire scene and then iron out any issues between agencies. At this year's scene we had six patients, fire and medics from every surrounding agency, and two airships. Reach and Mercy Air even gave everyone a tour of their airships and provided us with a training of how to approach the airship with a patient and what they are looking for in a landing zone. As a rookie at OW, this training is essential; it sets you on the right path and allows you to be mentally prepared for when the first medical goes out over the air. DL training provides everyone with a blueprint of how medicals are handled and what each agency expects. I would like to thank all the instructors that gave their time to this training. It is a great training and took lots of coordination before and during to pull off.

The Visitor Services team is excited for another season of riding here at OW. As the season picks up, we look forward to seeing our park visitors enjoying themselves over the weekend or over the holidays. As always we hope everyone has a safe and enjoyable time at OW.

## EMT of the Year Award Goes to Adam Borello!

Adam Borello, State Park Peace Officer Supervisor, received the Imperial County EMT of the Year award for medical aid he provided during a serious accident along Highway 78 in Ocotillo Wells. Borello and Jason Fincher, a former OW State Park Peace Officer, came upon a person lying on the ground near his quad. After ascertaining that the person was not breathing, Borello provided CPR with backup support from Fincher and Ocotillo Wells Fire. In addition, Borello used an AED several times when it announced "shock advised." After the Borrego Springs Paramedics arrived, they asked Borello to remain on CPR. The patient was flown out by helicopter to the hospital.

A week or two after the incident, a nurse passed along a thank you message from the trauma surgeon who worked on the patient at the hospital. He reported that had it not been for the quick actions of Borello and Fincher, the young man would most certainly not have recovered. We are fortunate to have such highly-trained professionals supporting Ocotillo Wells SVRA.



# Rangers Think Outside the Box ...

By Luke Ware, State Park Peace Officer

## ...For Common Challenges

Ocotillo Wells law enforcement (LE) staff have been forced to think outside the box on many issues and often come up with unique solutions. Over the years, the fleet of LE vehicles at OW has been subject to use and overuse. With the harsh desert environment taking its toll on the aging fleet, these vehicles commonly break coil springs, leaf springs, shocks, and other necessary components, or injure vehicle operators (Rangers and Lifeguard staff). Working with the District Maintenance leadership, Ocotillo Wells LE vehicle coordinators turned to Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) Fox Factory Inc. (Fox), for a solution to the accelerated maintenance cycle required by OW conditions and the driver fatigue/injury factor. Fox manufactures the OEM dampers on Ford Raptor pickups.

Ford Raptor pickups are equipped with position-sensitive dampers in stock configuration. This allows the trucks to glide safely and smoothly over rough terrain while eliminating harsh bottoming. Seeking to imitate this vehicle behavior for their own ailing fleet, OW staff procured dampers from Fox that bolt right into the factory vehicle mounts without any modification. OW staffers worked with the Offroad & Military Division at Fox to ensure the dampers would survive the conditions they are likely to experience. So far, all the drivers of vehicles equipped with these dampers have expressed relief about the reduced fatigue and increased control they experience. One staffer was heard saying, "It no longer feels like the truck is about to break in half whenever I hit a small bump. It is a lot safer!"



# Reaching Out to the Off-Road Community

By Sharon Weil, State Park Interpreter I

The Ocotillo Wells Interpretation Department recently attended the Hot August Nights off-road show August 6 in Temecula, the Orange County Sand Sport Super Show September 16, 17, & 18 in Costa Mesa, and the Lucas Oil Off-Road Expo October 1 & 2 in Pomona. These popular and well-attended shows mark the unofficial kick off of the desert riding season. Staff visited with thousands of attendees over the six days.



A big attraction during this year's shows was the Gnarly Beasts of the Past display, where the stories of the ancient animals who roamed the Borrego Valley were told. Whether it was the femur bone of



the Columbia Mammoth or skull of the Sabretooth cat, everyone wanted to hear more about these ancient creatures of the past. As visitors moved through "time," they were able to look closely at the skulls and skins of modern day animals that call Ocotillo Wells home, such as the coyote, bobcat and badger. Everyone loved being able to touch a real animal pelt and see what the animals skulls looked like. But, as always, the highlight was the



live animal display. There is nothing like a glowing scorpion, a beetle that plays dead and a lively discussion about the tarantula's mating habits to get the OHV community ready for a gnarly season of riding.

Staff answered questions about riding trails and available recreational facilities, and passed out

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# Reaching Out to the Community *continued...*

park maps, visitor guides, mammal, bug and reptile guides and interpretive trading cards. In addition, both events were awesome opportunities to reach out to the off-road community to promote safe riding, Tread Lightly principles and use of their state parks.



# Ocotillo Wells Critter Cam 2016

By Robert Delmanowski, Environmental Services Intern

The Natural Resources Department at Ocotillo Wells SVRA utilizes wildlife cameras every summer to document the larger mammals that are found throughout the park. The cameras are checked weekly by a field crew, who then review the photos. These “Critter Cams” catch unique moments in the wild and are a great way to study these animals. Here are a few sneak peaks at what we found!



Coyote close-up



Black-tailed jackrabbit ready to race



Kit fox on high alert



Curious kit fox hears the camera click

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# Ocotillo Wells Critter Cam 2016 *continued...*



Young coyote looking for water in the summer heat



Healthiest looking coyote seen in the park all year



Some animals don't like to pose for the camera like this prairie falcon



Raven party up Tectonic Gorge



The most common animal in OW—humans



# Trails News

By Ryan Walasek, Senior Maintenance Aide

After a windy summer and lots of sand being moved around, trails in Ocotillo Wells are not in the best of shape. Hand tools are enough to repair some, but others require heavy equipment due to the immense quantity of earth to be moved.

In addition to Poleline and other roads that are normally motor-graded, other trails such as Rock & Roll and Palo Verde Wash also underwent maintenance with heavy equipment.

Anthony Beepath of Trails worked with the heavy equipment operators Bob Moore from Silver Strand State Park and Monte Torina from Malibu State Park and the Resources Department to ensure that the necessary areas were cleared, while not harming any animals or plants.



Top Left: Rock & Roll  
Above: Pole Line  
Left: Palo Verde Wash

# What is a Manuport?

By Haley Elsen, Archaeological Project Leader

For thousands of years, people have collected rocks, sticks, pebbles, and other natural objects that have caught their eye. To archaeologists, once a human picks up a natural object and carries it around, potentially miles away from its origin, it becomes a manuport. Manuports are natural objects that have not been broken, polished, or in any way physically changed by humans, but have been transported by people. The oldest manuport discovered to date is the makapansgat pebble, a pebble which naturally looks like a human face. The pebble dates to as early as 3 million years ago and was collected by modern humankind's ancestor in South Africa.

While we don't have any manuports nearly that old in Ocotillo Wells State Vehicular Recreation Area, there are manuports here. Some of them are left in the park by modern visitors who bring rocks back to their campsite during their trip and leave a pile of goodies behind in the end. Some are potentially older. Manuports are important to archaeologists because archaeologists study human action through the physical objects left behind by past humans. The next time you make a collector's pile, remember that your actions just might be studied by an archaeologist in the future. Here are some pictures of manuports found in Ocotillo Wells State Vehicular Recreation Area.

What do you think they look like?



Sandstone concretions identified as manuports in the park

# A Tale of Intrigue

By Craig Fischer, Environmental Scientist

I wanted to share with you a tale of intrigue from a monitoring excursion back in early April! San Diego State University had sent a crew of young geologists to the park to map fault activity on a section of land near Poleline Road. Archaeologist Hayley Elsken and myself were monitoring their activity, as archaeologists and ecologists are wont to do. As she and I stood near a patch of rush milkweed in an ephemeral dune bank near a



wash, Hayley drew my attention to snake tracks in the sand. We identified the tracks as sidewinder and discussed the snake's whereabouts. As we mused, a tiger whiptail plummeted out of a burrobush, thrashed momentarily, and died. After we exchanged a look of surprise, we carefully examined nearby bushes, and found a sidewinder tucked deep beneath

a big galleta grass. The tracks from the whiptail made it seem as if the lizard caught the sidewinder unaware and the startled snake tagged the lizard in its back. When we returned the next day, snake and lizard had vanished (as expected)!!!!

This desert is pretty crazy. Enjoy the pictures!





# Salton Sea SRA

By Jose Renteria, Senior Park Aide

Hello everyone! My name is Jose Renteria, and I am the Senior Park Aide at the Salton Sea State Recreation Area—back for another season full of fun and exciting activities. Starting with the month of November and throughout the winter and spring, we're offering activities open to children and adults alike such as nature walks, bird watching tours, kayak tours, and Junior Ranger activities. We're also inviting special guest speakers to answer many questions regarding the future of the Salton Sea. Despite popular belief, that big blue lake is still wide open, particularly for water sports. With winter quickly approaching and folks from all over beginning to visit, we're just getting our feet wet...



**Editor's Note:** In an effort to better acquaint our readers with our sister California State Parks, we have invited them to send us their upcoming activities and news. The Salton Sea SRA is the first to join us here in the *Blowsand Reader*.

# Follow Ocotillo Wells SVRA on Facebook!



Find updates on changes in the park, historic and modern park photos, reminders about policies and regulations, and the schedule for our various interpretive programs. What a great forum for visitors to communicate and connect.



Check it out and “Like” us...because, after all, we like you.

[www.facebook.com/OcotilloWellsSVRA](https://www.facebook.com/OcotilloWellsSVRA)

## Upcoming OW Festivals

First Day Ride

January 1, 2017

Kids Adventure Connection

January 14-15, 2017

Geology Daze! Geology Festival

February 18-20, 2017

Hot Stars & Heavenly Bodies Astronomy Festival

March 25, 2017

Bug-a-Palooza Bug Festival

April 1-2, 2017

Eggs-travaganza

April 16, 2017



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